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SUBJECT: CODEL FEINGOLD MEETS WITH PML-N PARLIAMENTARY LEADER NISAR ALI KHAN

Classified by Ambassador Anne Patterson, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In a May 26 meeting with Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) parliamentary leader Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan, Senator Russ Feingold discussed Pakistan's current political situation and efforts to combat extremism. The PML-N, Nisar insisted, considers the U.S. to be a friend but took issue with the perception that the PML-N supported militants, adding that "we are not the right hand of Mullah Omar." The PML-N wants a peaceful and stable Pakistan that does not threaten other countries, but asked the U.S. to allow Pakistan to "give peace a chance" in negotiations with tribal groups. Pledging that the PML-N will maintain support of the current Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) government, Nisar criticized Musharraf for using the specter of terrorism to maintain U.S. support for his Presidency. Referring to "perception being stronger than reality" in Pakistan, Nisar claimed that the people of Pakistan see the U.S. as an impediment to the restoration of the judiciary. The U.S. is perceived as always backing Musharraf and this hurts the image of the U.S. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Senator Russ Feingold and the Ambassador met May 26 with Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz's (PML-N) parliamentary leader and party insider. Senator Feingold began by emphasizing the importance the U.S. places on its relationship with Pakistan, adding that the two countries have a historic opportunity develop a bilateral relationship based on mutual concerns. Declaring the U.S. as a "long time friend," Nisar began a reiteration of his defense of the PML-N and its pro-American positions. Nisar claimed the PML-N supported the U.S. "when it was not fashionable" during the Cold War and "took it on the chin" after supporting the U.S.-led coalition during the first Gulf War. The PML-N, he insisted, feels the U.S. is a friend and that we share common interests. Democratic government, he continued, allows tough choices to be made, including supporting the U.S. on controversial issues.

¶3. (C) Turning to counterterrorism cooperation, Senator Feingold thanked Pakistan for standing by the U.S. after 9/11 and for the Government of Pakistan's (GOP) continuing support for the War on Terror. Describing terrorism as Pakistan's problem, Nisar articulated the PML-N goal of a peaceful and stable Pakistan that does not threaten other countries, including the U.S. Nisar pledged to work with the U.S. on the issue, discussing differences in an open forum but "never behind your back."

¶4. (C) Nisar took issue with the perception that the PML-N supported militants, adding that "we are not the right hand of Mullah Omar." Recent election results in which the Islamist Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) party received only two percent of the national vote is an indication that the Pakistani people do not support extremism. Asking the U.S. to allow Pakistan to "give peace a chance," Nisar

believes that the military has been unable to tackle rising militancy in Pakistan. Negotiations with tribal leaders and Taliban groups ready to enter the political mainstream allow the GOP to isolate the real militants, he continued. Nisar pledged to use the military to go after those groups that "continue to use Pakistan as a launching pad" if peace negotiations fail.

¶5. (C) On the domestic political front, Nisar stated while the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and PML-N have different views on policy, both parties have eight years of joint struggle against President Musharraf. "The people want this coalition to last," he continued, pledging that the PML-N will maintain support of the PPP-led government. Nisar claimed that PPP Co-Chairman Asif Zardari was insistent on the PML-N joining the Federal Cabinet, but the PML-N's stronger position on the restoration of the judiciary made that difficult. Because the pre-November 2 judiciary was not restored within thirty days of the new government, the PML-N had a "moral obligation to walk away."

¶6. (C) Senator Feingold asked Nisar what steps the U.S. should take concerning the restoration of the judges. Referring to "perception being stronger than reality" in Pakistan, Nisar claimed that the people of Pakistan see the U.S. as an impediment to the restoration of the judges. Differing messages from the Bush Administration and members of Congress are partly to blame for that, he suggested. The U.S. is perceived as always backing Musharraf and this hurts the image of the U.S.

¶7. (C) Nisar thanked the U.S. for its assistance to Pakistan over the years but added that despite an "unbelievable U.S. investment" in Pakistan, public perception of the U.S. remains low and terrorism has

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increased. Nisar accused Musharraf of using the specter of terrorism to maintain U.S. support for his Presidency. The MMA is a "facade to frighten the West," he declared. Nisar alleged that the 2002 parliamentary election, in which the MMA secured 53 National Assembly seats, was engineered by Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) agency at Musharraf's request. Also blaming India-Pakistan tensions on Musharraf, Nisar remarked that Kashmiri extremists groups are so interlinked with the ISI that it is hard to determine "where the role of the militant ends and the ISI begins."

¶8. (C) Continuing on India-Pakistan relations, Nisar sees Nawaz Sharif and the PML-N as the architects of detente with India. Peace with India is a PML-N priority, he declared, proposing that trade be expanded and visa restrictions reduced. While progress has been made, India refuses "to give anything in return." India needs to take additional confidence building steps with Pakistan, Nisar suggested, adding that "when we release one their spies, they send us a coffin." Senator Feingold remarked that he would visit India after Pakistan and looked forward to discussing India-Pakistan relations in New Delhi.

¶9. (U) CODEL Feingold did not clear this cable.

PATTERSON